

R.T. Davies

Recognize Lithuania

By its failure to extend diplomatic recognition to the government of the Republic of Lithuania, the United States denies the Lithuanian people something we had given them every reason to expect of us once they had succeeded in freeing themselves from the domination of the Soviet government. What else were the Lithuanians to make of our 50-year-old policy of nonrecognition of their forcible incorporation into the Soviet Union, our broadcasts in the Lithuanian language over three radio networks and our annual proclamations of Captive Nations Day?

But now that the Lithuanians have freed themselves, the U.S. government says their new government lacks an essential component of the concept of sovereignty: effective control of the national territory.

This seems to have been no obstacle, however, when, on Dec. 20, 1989, the United States recognized the government of Guillermo Endara in Panama, even though President Endara controlled neither the Panamanian armed forces nor one inch of Panamanian territory, but, together with his colleagues, was dependent upon the U.S. armed forces for his physical safety.

Ample precedent exists in American diplomatic practice for the recognition of governments whose control over the territory of the states in question was not unqualified. During the period 1945-1989, the governments of most of the East European states had large contingents of Soviet troops on their soil. There was also a serious question of whether these governments could legitimately claim to represent the peoples over whom they held sway, a question that does not exist with regard to the present government of Lithuania.

Nevertheless, we maintained diplomatic missions in those countries because we did not wish to give their Communist governments an opportunity still further to isolate the people from contacts with the non-Communist world and because we wanted to reassure those peoples that the United States took a strong and continuing interest in their welfare and their eventual resumption of independence.

For 40 years and more, we followed the practice summarized by President Nixon in his 1970 foreign-policy report to Congress: "It is not the intention of the United States to undermine the legitimate security interests of the Soviet Union. . . . By the same token, the United States views the countries of Eastern Europe as sovereign, not as parts of a monolith. And we can accept no doctrine that abridges their right to seek reciprocal improvement of relations with us or others."

Since the United States has never recognized the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union, should not President Nixon's

words apply as much to it as they did to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany in earlier days? In none of those states did the question of U.S. recognition ever hinge on their effective control over their territory. The same applies to the recognition policies of our NATO allies.

Judging by the statements of President Bush and official spokesmen, the real reason for U.S. reluctance to recognize the government of the Republic of Lithuania is a desire not to "provoke" President Gorbachev and thereby cause him to slacken his pursuit of perestroika and glasnost and change his policies on summit meetings and reductions in military forces and weapons.

But the current policies of the Soviet government are designed to correct deep, systemic domestic problems resulting from the abject failure of the policies of earlier Soviet governments.

President Bush's fear that U.S. recognition of Lithuania might result in reversal of these policies seems to indicate a belief that Gorbachev's reforms are not so deeply rooted in Soviet reality as many both in the U.S.S.R. and abroad had concluded. But if this is so and those policies are so easily reversible, wouldn't it be better to find out now rather than later?

Gorbachev contends that the matter of Lithuania is an "internal affair," and protests that those who take an interest in it are "interfering" in Soviet domestic politics.

In 1975, however, the Soviet Union (and the United States) signed the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which contains a number of ringing affirmations of the right of peoples to self-determination, including this paragraph:

"The participating States reaffirm the universal significance of respect for and effective exercise of equal rights and self-determination of peoples for the development of friendly relations among themselves as among all States; they also recall the importance of the elimination of any form of violation of this principle."

The inclusion of the subject of national self-determination in an international instrument such as the Final Act is tantamount to recognition by the signatories that cases involving this principle are legitimate subjects of international discourse.

President Bush should look again at this problem in the light of Lincoln's words, "No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent," and recognize the government of the Republic of Lithuania.

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